

# DEBUTANTE--AMERICAN CREATION

## No Beating of Drums When Young Woman Makes Her First Appearance in the Social Circles of Europe.

By MRS. CHARLOTTE M. CONGER.

The debutante is an American institution. The word is French, but the person who exists in America is known neither in France nor in any other country in the world. In all civilized places girl children grow up, and when they reach the proper age are introduced to their parents' friends and take their places in the world, sharing in its distractions and its duties. But in older countries the introduction into the world of young women is compassed without undue ostentation and stir.

There is no beating of drums, no flourish of trumpets when a young woman makes her appearance on the social stage of London, Paris, Berlin. Her photograph is not published in the paper, nor are her gowns described. There are no foibles reported concerning her varied talents and accomplishments.

Her mother introduces her to her friends, who receive her graciously into their circle and entertain her, but there is no commotion, no great excitement. The whole proceeding is quiet and dignified.

### Different in America.

How different are the circumstances surrounding a young girl's introduction into society in New York or Washington.

From now on until the last bud has made her formal courtesy on the stage of vanity fair, the papers will be filled with the doings of the debutantes. Their pictures in many different poses will be published, their wardrobes described.

Miss Debutante's favorite authors will be set down, her favorite composers will be noted, her pastimes, the sports she indulges in will be listed. Pretty stories of her charities will appear. Nothing is hidden regarding the doings of the little debutante. All the world is invited to come and look on at her debut. She lives during her first season in a glass house.

Why do the newspapers print such gossip? Because their readers demand it. Because Miss Debutante herself or Miss Debutante's mother sent out notices of Miss Debutante's doings and of what she intends doing, to be printed in the society column.

While Miss Debutante is being advertised the child herself and her mother are deeply concerned in preparing for the event. If they are rich the matter is, of course, a simple one. Mamma and the "but" run over to Paris, bring back a cartload more or less of clothes, on which Mr. Loeb exacts the full duty. Beside the finery with the Paris stamp they bring over favors for the Germans, dinner cards, and other conceits that are to be found nowhere else in the world as unique and varied as in Paris.

Sometimes papa takes a deep interest in the affair and sends to Central and South America for rare and beautiful butterflies to be let loose on the gaping crowd at daughter's coming-out cotillion.

Some one reading this will utter the sophism, "Yes, but that puts money into circulation." To be sure it puts money into circulation, but it sets a vulgar and base standard that counteracts any good effect that the money thus put in circulation might have.

Airs of an Empress.

Miss Debutante, launched by her papa, be he rich or be he poor, begins the battle. Her coming-out ball is the overture, as it were, to the opera bouffe that is to follow. The child has been taken so seriously by her admiring parents and her admiring friends that she has been persistently pushed into the center of their small stage, she has been so written up and her photograph so widely published that she has come to regard herself as a most important person, and she puts on the airs and graces of an empress.

She has been so humored, so given in to by her doting parents and the little clique of which she is the center, that she is petulant and peevish, capricious and fantastic, unpleasing qualities, all of them, that do not make for the cordial acceptance of any one whom they dominate. So Miss Debutante finds herself not so much sought after, not so much followed and fawned upon as she had pictured.

She sees older, homelier, less graceful girls outdilate her, and she wonders. These girls are not as rich, not as pretty, not as well dressed. What then is the charm? The reason is not difficult to find. They have been out several seasons and they have discovered that to be launched at a great ball, to be written up and talked about, to wear fine clothes and to have a rich papa—even that, the rich papa—do not compel success.

All the time and money spent in these great splurges are wasted except in the way of experience, and a clever woman, a woman of experience, and of the world could teach her more in one morning than she could learn from all these.

### System a Mistake.

The whole system governing debuts is a mistake. It is a mistake to make a girl conspicuous, no matter in what way, before the world. It is a mistake to think that a young girl should be "written up." It is a mistake that, no matter how much wealth in the family, a young woman should have such tremendous sums spent on her coming-out as we Americans spend.

It is a mistake that she should be taught to regard herself as an important personage, for those things make for egotism, foolish pride, and vanity, and we should look to it that our daughters are not egotistical, that they are not foolishly proud or sordidly vain, but that they are pure in mind and spirit, humble, devoted, unselfish, that they may play the part in life for which they are cast splendidly, nobly.

It makes little difference what the part is, whether it is played in a cabin in some spot remote from civilization, or whether it is the role of a brilliant and fashionable woman in a splendid environment, the White House, for instance, or an embassy.

It makes no difference what walk of life she treads so long as she treads with firm and certain steps, with pride and dignity.

"Would you take all fun, all pleasure, all her good times away from a girl?" some one asks. On the contrary, a normal girl should have all the fun, all the pleasure, all the "good times" she consistently can. But I am not convinced that a girl's first season, as we manage it, brings fun, pleasure, and good times. I have heard not one but many young women speak of that "dreadful first season," of its disappointments, its chagrin, and mortifications. The realization of it is so far removed from the anticipation. The demands upon a girl of frail physique, fresh from the school room, are greater than she can endure. Constant late hours, heavy dinners, the nibbling at afternoon teas,

dancing until one is prone to fall from sheer fatigue, would make inroads on the constitution of a strong man. What wonder then that delicate girls break down long before the end of that "dreadful first season?"

There are demands upon the child's intellect, too, as well as upon her physical strength. "What is she aiming at?" some one reads this will think. "Doesn't she believe in girls going into the world, meeting their parents and making friends of their own. Would she cloister all young girls or keep them in the school forever?"

Most earnestly I believe in girls going into the world, in their meeting their parents' friends, and making friends of their own.

I believe, too, in their getting all the wholesome enjoyment they can; I believe in free spirits, much laughter, gaiety and fun, in dancing and society.

But I believe that young and old should get the full enjoyment of everything that comes their way, but our system, the American system of introducing young girls into society is insufferable.

There is more space devoted to some obscure child that comes out in Washington than is devoted to a change of cabinets of one of the great powers.

It is unwise, poor policy, to put any one in a position he cannot fill. A shipman's mate is not put in command of a ship. He is trained, given experience, tried out in lesser billets before he reaches the grade of captain, but Miss Young American is launched into society often times fresh from the school room and told to go and carve out her social fortunes. Admitting that the American girl is capable of almost anything, she is not capable of doing this and when she finds out that in spite of all of the adulation, the flowers, the music, the expensive favors she is only a callow little girl after all, the awakening is not always pleasant.

So I would do away with all this splurging and nonsense and have a girl's entrance into society marked by dignity, grace, and refinement. I would have her social life balanced just as her school life is balanced, and I would counsel moderation. If a person has too much of anything, too much of a glutton, a gourmand, but what about the girl who drinks too deep of the pleasures that are offered her?

A girl is generally blase before the end of her first season, bored to death at the end of her second, and if she is not married at the beginning of her third she seeks new excitements and dissipations to prevent her from dying outright from ennui, and this happens because she goes into society with such a rush and keeps up such a mad pace.

Fancy a girl saying, as I heard one say last winter: "I have a dinner and a little dance for Monday; Tuesday there is a luncheon, nine teas, a dinner, a reception, and a cotillon on my list; Wednesday, a luncheon again, then I am going to receive at one of the Cabinet houses; dinner, the theater, and a supper afterward; Thursday, I have nothing to do—actually nothing, but the rest of the week is as full as the first of it, only there is Thursday; how in the world shall I get through with Thursday?"

How would I change things, you ask? I would have a girl when she enters society go about with her mother, always with her mother or some older and experienced woman, until she comes to know her parents' friends and to make the new friends her parents think well for her to make, and until she learns from contact with the world where she belongs in it and what her attitude should be.

I would have her accept only as many invitations as she can credibly accept, that is, I would not have her go as a guest to people's houses when she cannot fulfill all of the obligations that should be expected of a guest.

It is no compliment to one's hostess, and should be no pleasure for one's self, to attend a dinner when one is so tired, so out of sorts that one cannot contribute to the success and brightness of the dinner for the duty of a guest is as sacred as that of a host. I would have her dance, but not beyond her strength, and I would have her have the courage to refuse to dance without fear of being called a wall flower. I would have, my little debutante, never greedy, in all of her pleasures, never greedy. If she is the hostess I would have her look to it that all of her guests are provided with partners before she steps onto the floor, and if she is a guest to expect similar courtesy.

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